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ABSTRACT

This document is a summary of the longer document of the same name which was published by the Social Security Administration in response to the changes in American society that have made the traditional male/female roles of lifelong worker/lifelong homemaker no longer representative. The study focused on such issues as dependent's benefits and whether they work as now structured; the plight of women divorced before retirement age; the problem of disabled homemakers; and other problems of groups of people, mostly women, who do not qualify for benefits when they need them, or alternatively, groups who receive benefits disproportionately, such as one-income couples versus two-income couples. Ths summary presents the following positions: (1) earnings sharing, and the eventual elimination of the spouse's benefit; (2) a two-tier benefit system, in which a minimum benefit would be paid to everyone and the second-tier benefit would be tied directly to earnings; and (3) universal coverage as the best solution to the offset provision of the Social Security amendments of 1977. (KC)

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SOCIAL SECURITY AND THE CHANGING ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN (A SUMMARY)

Retirement Memo 1979-2

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SOCIAL SECURITY AND THE CHANGING ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN (A SUMMARY)

NEA Research Memo *May 1979*

Retirement has become a very active political issue. The Advisory Council on Social Security, the National Commission on Social Security, the President's Commission on Pension Policy, the Universal Coverage Study Group, and many others are studying the issues that relate to retirement in general and to Social Security in particular.

The 1977 amendments to the Social Security Act instructed the U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Joseph A. Califano, Jr., in consultation with the Task Force on Sex Discrimination and the Social Security Administration, to conduct a study of and make recommendations with respect to gender-based distinctions in the Social Security program.

On February 15, 1979, Secretary Califano released the final report, entitled *Social Security and the Changing Roles of Men and Women*, together with a press release and a summary. NEA has reproduced the summary because it presents a clear picture of the direction in which Secretary Califano and the Social Security Administration would like to move the Social Security program.

The summary presents the following positions:

- Earnings sharing, and the eventual elimination of the spouse's benefit.
- A two-tier benefit system, in which a minimum benefit would be paid to everyone and the second-tier benefit would be tied directly to earnings.
- Universal coverage is proposed as the best solution to the offset provision of the Social Security amendments of 1977.

Secretary Califano intends the report to be a vehicle to spark debate on the issues, not as proposed legislation. Indeed, the report of the Universal Coverage Study Group, due December 20, 1979, will need to be received, studied, and digested before any meaningful legislation can be proposed.

This, therefore, is the appropriate time for citizens to raise questions and voice objections about the Social Security program. Examples of the types of issues raised by the report are as follows:

- What requirements must people meet in "Tier I" of the two-tier benefit system? A means test? Increased red tape? Longer lines at Social Security offices? Will they be made to feel that they are receiving welfare?
- Will the family maximum (mentioned under paragraph D on page 24) increase as the cost of living increases?
- No mention of transitional provisions is made in the summary report. How are such transitions proposed? Are they realistic?
- In the discussion of the public pension offset, why is no reference made to the fact that there is no offset for private sector employees?

Please send any comments or recommendations on these issues to Byron Spice, Room 510, NEA, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

For a copy of the unabridged, 323-page report, write to the Chief, Benefits Branch, 446 Altmeyer Building, Social Security Administration, 6401 Security Boulevard, Baltimore, Md. 21235.

SUMMARY

Social Security and the Changing Roles of Men and Women

INTRODUCTION

Under the Social Security Amendments of 1977 (P.L. 95-216), the Congress required the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, in consultation with the Department of Justice Task Force on Sex Discrimination, to study and prepare a report on proposals to eliminate dependency as a factor in entitlement to social security spouse's benefits and to eliminate sex discrimination under the social security program.

When the social security program was established in 1935, basic protection was provided for workers in the jobs that were covered under social security. In 1939, before social security benefits were first paid, supplementary protection was provided for workers' wives and widows as dependents. This method of providing protection reflected a pattern of family relationships in American society--lifelong marriages in which women were solely homemakers and men provided economic support--that was much more common then than today.

The traditional roles of lifelong homemaker and lifelong paid worker are no longer as typical; rather, there is a growing diversity of roles. The labor-force participation of married women had grown from 17 percent in 1940 to about 47 percent in 1977 and is expected to continue to grow. Although more married women are working, the majority do not work when their children are very young. In 1977, 39 percent of married women under age 55 with preschool-age children who were living with their husbands were in the paid labor force.

The increase in the divorce rate also has contributed to the growing diversity of family roles and work patterns since many divorced women must work to support themselves or their families. The ratio of divorces to marriages increased from one in six in 1940 to one in two in 1975. The marriages of one in three women age 26 to 40 are expected to end in divorce.

For a variety of reasons, many more married women are working but no typical pattern of lifetime roles is emerging. Some married women are lifetime homemakers, some are paid workers throughout their lives, and others combine these two roles.

There also have been changes in the way society in general thinks about the role of women and in the way women view themselves. There is a growing perception that married women should not be treated as dependents under social security because so many of them work in paid jobs and are not financially dependent on their husbands. Women are increasingly recognized as equal partners in marriage, which is viewed as an interdependent economic relationship where each spouse renders services of an economic value to the family. And women generally view themselves as having a choice of careers--working in paid employment, working as unpaid homemakers, or both.

As a result of these changes in society, interest has grown in the way women are treated under the social security program. A central issue is whether the system of dependent's benefits designed decades ago adequately serves today's society. The present social security structure works best in the case of a lifelong married couple where one spouse is a lifelong paid worker and the other is a lifelong homemaker. Many believe that social security should be changed so that it accommodates the diversity of roles and work patterns of men and women in today's society.

In addition to the issue of the dependency basis of benefits, a number of other important social security issues are discussed in the report, including the fairness of treatment of couples when both spouses work, and the adequacy of protection for divorced people, disabled homemakers, widows, etc. Many of these issues are closely related to the primary issue of whether dependency is an appropriate device for providing benefits for many women.

Congress directed that this study examine ways to eliminate dependency as a factor in determining entitlement to social security spouse's benefits. In response,

the report explores two comprehensive options for dealing with the issues that arise from the present system of providing dependent's benefits. The two options are earnings sharing and establishment of a new double-decker benefit structure for the social security program.

Earnings sharing would provide for the equal division between the spouses of total annual earnings of a married couple for each year of the marriage. Thus, each spouse would have social security protection in his or her own right that could be added to any protection acquired as a covered worker while unmarried or from other marriages. The double-decker plan would provide a two-tier benefit structure. The first tier would be a flat-rate benefit payable regardless of marital status or work in jobs covered under social security. The second tier would be an earnings-related benefit payable to everyone who had worked in a covered job.

The report also includes more limited options for dealing with some of the issues that have been raised, provisions in the law that treat men and women differently and proposals to eliminate the differences, and issues concerning the public pension offset provision enacted as part of the 1977 social security amendments and possible modifications and alternatives to this provision.

This study was conducted by the Social Security Administration with assistance from a variety of sources. In planning the study, discussions were held with representatives of the Department of Justice Task Force on Sex Discrimination, Congresswomen's Caucus staff, and interested congressional committee staffs. Drafts of the study were circulated for comments to these persons, whose suggestions were very helpful.

This report is intended to focus public debate on concerns about the way social security relates to the present complex and diversified structure of American society and on various options to deal with these concerns. The report contains no recommendations for legislative changes; such recommendations would be premature at this time. Extensive public debate of

the issues and options is necessary before any consensus can be reached on what changes might be desirable. For this reason the report should be given wide distribution so that it can be used as a basic resource document for consideration of these issues. In addition, the options discussed in the report are complex and will require further refinement and study before their precise effects on the protection of various groups, and on other public and private income maintenance programs, are fully known.

ISSUES

Most of the issues that have been raised pivot on the fact that married women generally have social security protection as dependents of their husbands. Under the current program, a married woman can receive benefits as a dependent wife or widow (or ex-wife) of a covered worker; she can also receive benefits as a covered worker in her own right, but she cannot receive both benefits in full. If she is entitled to both a worker's benefit and a dependent's benefit, she receives an amount equal to the higher of the two benefits--that is, she receives her worker's benefit plus the amount, if any, by which the spouse's benefit exceeds the worker's benefit. (This is called the dual entitlement provision.)

The concerns about the social security protection of women relate to the fundamental goals of the system which are to provide benefits that are adequate to meet important social needs and at the same time are equitably distributed among different categories of beneficiaries and contributors to the program. In many cases, the goals of adequacy and equity are inconsistent; program changes that improve adequacy may reduce equity and vice-versa. This tension has been with the system since its inception, and the appropriate balance between these two goals is often a source of controversy.

The issues that have been identified are fundamentally tied to the social security program's twin goals of adequacy and equity and the conflicts between them. Reducing inequities for women workers while providing adequate protection for women with little paid work history will involve striking a new balance between the adequacy and equity of the social security system.

Adequacy Concerns

One area of concern arises from gaps and inadequacies in the protection provided for homemakers and dependent spouses. Homemaker or childcare activities may preclude or reduce participation of married women in the paid labor force therefore preventing them from obtaining primary protection as workers. Also, since dependent's benefits are based on a proportion of the worker's benefits and are only payable under certain conditions, homemakers may have inadequate protection under social security. These concerns include:

- Married women workers get substantially lower benefits than men workers both because they frequently spend time out of the paid labor force (or work part time) to perform homemaker or childcare activities and because average wages for women are lower than for men.

- The divorced wife's benefit of 50 percent of the worker's benefit is often not adequate to support a divorced homemaker living alone. A divorced person has no social security protection based on the marriage if it lasted less than 10 years. This concern becomes more important as the divorce rate increases.

- Widowed homemakers under age 60 cannot receive benefits unless they are either at least age 50 and disabled or are caring for children. Many widows have no social security protection during a period when they may face difficulty entering or reentering the labor force.

- Women working in the home have gaps in disability protection. Benefits are not provided for disabled homemakers or their children if the homemaker has no recent attachment to the paid work force. 1/ Widows who become disabled under age 50 do not have

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1/ In general, in order to meet the recency-of-work test for disability benefits, a person needs 5 years of covered work out of the 10 years preceding onset of disability.

disability protection.

- Aged widows frequently remain on the benefit rolls for many years; they often do not have resources to supplement their social security benefits, may live in poverty, and may need additional protection.

Equity Concerns

A second area of concern centers on the equity of benefits between one- and two-earner couples and married and single workers. These concerns include:

- Because of the operation of the dual entitlement provision, married women may find that the social security protection they earn as workers may duplicate, rather than add to, the protection they already have as spouses.

- Some two-earner couples are concerned that benefits are often higher for couples where one spouse earned all (or most) of the income than for couples where both spouses had earnings even though their total family earnings are the same.

- Since benefits are payable to dependents, married workers receive greater protection under social security than single workers, even though both pay social security taxes at the same rate; single workers may view this situation as inequitable.

COMPREHENSIVE OPTIONS

This section discusses the effects of two broad-scale options that would deal in a comprehensive way with the issues; these options are earnings sharing and a double-decker plan. These options should be viewed as a basis for discussion rather than as recommendations for legislative action.

Under earnings sharing, 50 percent of the total annual earnings of the couple would be credited to each spouse's individual earnings record. The benefits for each spouse would be based on one-half of the couple's earnings during years of marriage and on individual earnings while unmarried. The idea underlying earnings sharing is that each spouse is an equal partner

in marriage and each--whether a worker in paid employment or an unpaid homemaker--should have equal credit for total family earnings. This idea implies, then, that each should have equal social security protection in his or her own right rather than as a dependent of the other spouse.

Under a double-decker plan a new two-tier benefit system would be established. A flat-dollar benefit (tier I) would be payable to everyone, regardless of earnings, who met certain requirements. In addition, an earnings-related benefit (tier II) would be payable on the basis of earnings from employment covered under social security. Certain features of the earnings sharing option would be incorporated in the provisions for tier II to deal more comprehensively with the issues that have been raised.

Examples of benefits that would be payable to married couples and surviving spouses under both options are shown in Table 1 (page 21) and a comparison of the specific provisions of the options and present law is shown in Table 3 (pages 23 and 24).

In designing the options, arbitrary decisions were frequently necessary to estimate costs. In general, the options were designed with the idea that a new benefit system should result in costs that would approximate long-range costs under present law. Because of these cost constraints, when benefits were increased in some areas, reductions were provided in other areas. Further, to hold down costs, benefits for one- and two-earner couples were equalized by reducing benefits for one-earner couples rather than by raising benefits for two-earner couples.

The estimated long-range (75-year) cost of the earnings-sharing option comes very close to approximating long-range costs under present law. This option is estimated to decrease long-range costs by an average

0.06 percent of taxable payroll. 2/ (If applied to 1979 taxable payroll, 0.06 percent would represent savings of $0.6 billion over present law.)

The long-range costs of the double-decker plan are highly dependent on how the benefits are adjusted to keep pace with rising wages or prices. Under various assumptions for adjusting the benefits the estimated long-range cost of the double-decker plan would range from a cost of 0.50 percent of taxable payroll ($5 billion if applied to 1979 taxable payroll) to a savings of 1.86 percent of taxable payroll ($19 billion if applied to 1979 taxable payroll). The long-range cost of the double-decker plan could closely approximate present law costs by changing the way the tier I benefit is adjusted for changes in economic conditions or by making other changes in the plan.

Table 2 (page 22) contains long-range cost estimates for each option. The estimates are based on the assumption that each option would apply only to people becoming eligible for benefits in January 1980 or later. Although the options, as designed, would not affect current beneficiaries, transitional provisions would be needed to avoid reducing potential benefits for people nearing retirement when the new program went into effect. In addition, transitional provisions could be designed to adjust benefits for those already retired who would otherwise not benefit from the increased protection provided under a new plan; such provisions would increase short-range costs.

The estimated costs of the comprehensive options refer only to the cost impact on the social security program; they do not take account of the cost impact of each plans's interaction with various other governmental income-assistance programs such as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children(AFDC) and Supplemental Security

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2/ Long-range costs are expressed as a percentage of taxable payroll. The cost or saving of a provision represents the average amount over a 75-year period by which the combined employee-employer social security tax rate would have to be raised or lowered to leave the social security trust funds in the same financial position.

Income (SSI) programs, both financed with general revenues, rather than through the social security trust funds. The cost of these programs may either increase or decrease depending on the option selected and the specific features it contains. Additional study will be needed to determine how changes in social security will affect these other programs.

Option #1: Earnings Sharing

Under earnings sharing, a couple's annual earnings would be divided equally between them for the years they were married for purposes of computing retirement benefits. The earnings would be divided when the couple divorced or when one spouse reached age 62. This would entitle each spouse to a primary benefit which would replace aged dependent spouse's and surviving spouse's benefits provided under present law.

The basic earnings-sharing idea has been modified in certain respects in order to pay benefits that are somewhat comparable to present law benefits. The modifications are:

1. When one spouse dies, the survivor would be credited with 80 percent of the total annual earnings of the couple during the marriage, but not less than 100 percent of the earnings of the higher earner.

2. For purposes of benefits for young survivors--children and young surviving spouses caring for children--earnings would not be transferred between the spouses with regard to a marriage in effect at the time of death. Benefits for young survivors would be based on any earnings credits the deceased person had from paid work (while unmarried or during a current marriage), plus any credits acquired as a result of a prior marriage terminated by death or divorce.

3. For purposes of disability benefits, earnings would not be shared with regard to a marriage still in effect at the time of disability. Disability benefits would be based on any earnings credits the disabled person had from paid work (while unmarried or during the current marriage), plus any credits acquired from a prior marriage.

Option #1 also includes certain features that are not essential to earnings sharing. These features are included to illustrate one way of dealing comprehensively with the concerns that have been raised or to limit the cost of the option to roughly that of present law. For example, benefits would be payable to surviving mothers and fathers only until the youngest child reaches age 7, rather than age 18 as under present law. To make up partially for this benefit loss, an adjustment benefit equal to 100 percent of the deceased spouse's benefit would be payable for one year following the death of the spouse. This benefit would be paid regardless of whether there are any children in the family eligible for benefits.

Response to Issues: Following is a list of the ways earnings sharing would respond to the issues discussed previously.

1. Low benefits for women workers who spend time out of the paid labor force in childcare and homemaking activities. The plan would not reduce the number of years used to compute average earnings but would improve the protection of married women through sharing of earnings during a marriage.

2. Gaps in protection for divorced women. The sharing, upon divorce, of earnings during a marriage would help prevent gaps in protection for divorced women; each spouse would have protection in his or her own right.

3. Aged widows may need additional protection. Inheritance of earnings credits would substantially improve protection for many survivors of two-earner couples with lifelong marriages; benefits for the survivors of one-earner couples would not vary substantially from present law.

4. Benefits are not provided for nondisabled surviving spouses under age 60 unless they are caring for children. Persons widowed before retirement age would receive an adjustment benefit for one year. Protection would be reduced for some widowed persons under age 60 who do not have children under age 7 in their care. (Under present law widows can receive benefits if they have a child under age 18

in their care.) Under the earnings-sharing option, only the one-year adjustment benefit would be paid to surviving spouses who do not have a child under age 7 in their care. Aged surviving spouses could not get benefits (other than the adjustment benefit) until age 62, rather than age 60 as under present law.

5. Some married women workers do not meet the recency-of-work test to qualify for disability benefits. Earnings credits acquired due to death of a spouse or divorce would help some divorced and widowed women to meet the recency-of-work test.

6. Benefits are not provided for disabled homemakers. This option would not provide disability protection for married homemakers.

7. Benefits are not provided for disabled widows and widowers under age 50. Surviving spouses would acquire earnings credits that would count toward disability protection in their own right at any age.

8. Benefits are not provided for survivors of deceased homemakers. This option would not provide protection for the survivors of married homemakers who die. Divorced and widowed homemakers would acquire earnings credits that would count toward protection for their survivors.

9. Benefits of married women as paid workers largely duplicate their benefits as dependents. Each spouse would get a benefit based on his or her earnings while single, and earnings credits acquired as a result of marriage.

10. Different benefit amounts may be paid to married couples with the same total average earnings. Retired couples (in a lifelong marriage) with the same total average earnings would receive the same total benefits.

11. Different benefit amounts may be paid to the survivors of married couples with the same total average earnings. The difference in benefits for survivors of one- and two-earner couples would be reduced but not eliminated.

12. Married workers have greater social security protection than single workers. Elimination of dependent spouse's benefits would decrease the difference in protection of married workers compared to single workers under present law.

Major Effects of Earnings Sharing

Effects on Retired People: Retirement benefits would be the same for lifelong married couples with the same total average earnings. Benefits would be reduced for one-earner couples; the benefit of the higher-earning spouse would be less than under present law and the benefit of the lower-earning spouse would be higher. For most couples in which no dependent spouse's benefit would be payable under present law, there would be no change in benefit amounts. Assuming a lifelong marriage, each spouse would receive the same benefit amount.

Under the 50-50 sharing of earnings at divorce, the lower-earning spouse would have greater protection and the higher-earning spouse would have lower protection than under present law. The amount of change would depend on the duration of the marriage and the level of earnings, if any, of each spouse both during and after the marriage.

Benefits equal to 50 percent of the retired person's basic benefit would be paid to children and young spouses caring for children under age 7 (or disabled). The same maximum limit on family benefits would apply that applies under present law.

Effects on Survivors: The surviving spouse would inherit 80 percent of the total annual earnings of the couple during the marriage, but not less than 100 percent of the earnings of the higher-earning spouse. Survivors of two-earner couples (with lifelong marriages) would generally get higher benefits than under present law. Benefits for survivors of one-earner couples would generally be about the same as under present law--they could exceed benefits for survivors of two-earner couples with the same total average earnings, although by less than under present law.

Protection would be reduced for surviving spouses with a child in their care as follows: (1) No benefits would

be paid unless the child were under age 7 (rather than under age 18 as under present law); and (2) the benefit amount would be 50 percent of the worker's basic benefit (rather than 75 percent as under present law).

This modification of present law was included to reduce costs, to reduce the payment of benefits to spouses as dependents, and to channel benefits more directly to children. Since the labor-force participation of women increases substantially when they do not have preschool-age children, there may be less need to provide a monthly benefit for such women.

An adjustment benefit equal to 100 percent of the deceased spouse's basic benefit would be provided for one year for surviving spouses under age 62 to help meet the special needs of homemakers widowed before old age.

Dependent's benefits would not be paid to widows and widowers age 60 and 61 or to disabled widows and widowers age 50-60, but they would qualify for an adjustment benefit; such people might have disability protection in their own right based on inherited earnings credits.

The benefit for a surviving child under age 18 or disabled would be 100 percent of the deceased person's basic benefit (rather than 75 percent as under present law). Where there is more than one surviving child in a family, the total benefits to the children would be equal to 100 percent of the worker's basic benefit for one child plus 50 percent of the worker's basic benefit for each additional child. Each child would get an equal share of the total.

Earnings during a marriage still in effect at the time one spouse dies would not be shared (or inherited) for purposes of paying benefits to young survivors. As a result, when a lifelong-married homemaker dies, her surviving children would not receive benefits. However, divorced or widowed homemakers could become insured for benefits as a result of earnings sharing at divorce or inheriting earnings at death.

Effects on Disabled People: Benefits for a disabled earner would be roughly the same as present law benefits. Benefits would be based on the person's own earnings, taking into account earnings shared with a spouse during a prior marriage or credits acquired due to the death of a spouse.

Disabled lifelong homemakers could be eligible for disability protection only on the basis of earnings credits acquired as a result of divorce or death of a prior spouse; earnings of a spouse in a current marriage could not be counted.

Although the present survivor's benefits for disabled widows and widowers would be eliminated, widowed homemakers might qualify for disability benefits on the basis of earnings credits inherited when their spouses died. The disability benefits would be payable at any age (not only between age 50-60 as under present law).

Disability protection for lower-paid or non-paid divorced spouses would be improved as the result of the 50-50 split of earnings at divorce. Disability protection for divorced people who were the higher (or sole) earner would be reduced due to the 50-50 split of earnings.

The provisions for children and spouses with children in their care would be the same as for dependents of retired earners.

Option #2: Double-Decker Benefit Structure

Under the double-decker option, each U.S. resident would have retirement, survivors, and disability protection. This universal protection would be the first tier of a two-tier system. Tier I would be a flat-dollar payment of $122 for U.S. residents beginning at age 65 (or upon disability). Reduced benefits would be paid as early as age 62. Tier II would be a benefit equal to 30 percent of a person's average earnings in covered employment. Tier II benefits would be payable as early as age 62 (reduced if taken before age 65). The benefit for an aged or disabled worker would be equal to the sum of a tier I and a tier II benefit.

Under the double-decker option, the adequacy and equity elements of the program would be separated--tier I generally would provide the social adequacy element and tier II the equity element. Dealing with the goals of adequacy and equity under social security with separate benefit tiers should make it easier for the public

to understand the underlying principles and for policy-makers to develop proposals to fulfil specific goals.

A number of the features of this option are not an integral part of a basic double-decker system but were included to improve the protection of specific groups of persons. Such features include the 50-50 split of earnings at divorce, the inheritance of earnings by a surviving spouse for purposes of computing tier II benefits, and the provision of an adjustment benefit to a surviving spouse at any age. These features of the plan are generally the same as those under earnings sharing although the benefit amounts would be somewhat different due to the different benefit structure.

Response to Issues: Following is a list of the ways the double decker option would respond to the issues discussed previously.

1. Low benefits for women workers who spend time out of the paid labor force in childcare and homemaking activities. The plan would not reduce the number of years used to compute average earnings for tier II benefit purposes, but it would improve protection for some women workers by providing for a split of earnings upon divorce and inheritance of earnings credits from a deceased spouse.

2. Gaps in protection for divorced women. Aged or disabled divorced persons would get a tier I benefit; divorced persons would get earnings credits for tier II purposes equal to half of the couple's annual earnings during their marriage.

3. Aged widows may need additional protection. Aged or disabled widowed persons would get a tier I benefit; inheritance of earnings credits for tier II benefit purposes would improve protection for many widows.

4. Benefits are not provided for nondisabled surviving spouses under age 60 unless they are caring for children. Persons widowed before retirement age would receive an adjustment benefit for one year.

Protection would be reduced for some widowed persons under age 60 who do not have children under age 7 in their care. (Under present law widows can receive benefits if they have a child under age 18 in their care.) Under the double-decker option, only the one-year adjustment benefit would be paid to surviving spouses who do not have children under age 7 in their care. Aged surviving spouses could not get benefits (other than the adjustment benefit) until age 62, rather than age 60 as under present law.

5. Some married women workers do not meet the recency-of-work test to qualify for disability benefits. There would be no insured status requirement to qualify for disability benefits under either test.

6. Benefits are not provided for disabled homemakers. Disabled homemakers could receive a tier I benefit. If they acquired any earnings credits, they could also get a tier II benefit.

7. Benefits are not provided for disabled widows and widowers under age 50. Disabled widows would receive full tier I benefits at any age plus tier II benefits based on earnings credits acquired as a result of their own paid work or from prior marriages.

8. Benefits are not provided for survivors of deceased homemakers. Survivors of deceased homemakers could receive tier I benefits plus any tier II benefits based on individual earnings and earnings credits acquired due to prior marriages.

9. Benefits of married women as paid workers largely duplicate their benefits as dependents. Each aged or disabled person would get a tier I benefit in his or her own right, plus a tier II benefit if he or she had earnings credits.

10. Different benefit amounts may be paid to married couples with the same total average earnings. Retired couples with the same total average earnings would receive the same total benefits.

11. Different benefit amounts may be paid to the survivors of married couples with the same total average earnings. The difference in benefits for survivors of one- and two-earner couples would be reduced but not eliminated.

12. Married workers have greater social security protection than single workers. Elimination of dependent spouse's benefits would decrease the advantage of married workers under present law.

Major Effects of Double-Decker Plan

Effects on Retired People: Older people who are not eligible for any social security benefits under present law would get a tier I benefit. If they had any covered earnings, they would also get a tier II benefit even if they were not insured for benefits under present law. Benefit amounts would be lower than under present law for one-earner couples (except at very low earnings levels where they would be higher). Benefits for two-earner couples would not vary significantly from present law (except at very low earnings levels where they would be higher).

A homemaker spouse would get a tier I benefit in his or her own right instead of a dependent spouse's benefit as under present law. Tier I benefits would be higher than dependent spouse's benefits under present law in cases where the primary earner was low paid and lower in all others.

As under earnings sharing, earnings credits for each year of the marriage would be split 50-50 upon divorce. The effects on protection would be similar under both options although the benefit amounts involved would be different.

Benefits would be paid to children and young spouses caring for entitled children of retired workers under the same conditions as under earnings sharing but the benefit amounts would be different. Each would get a tier I benefit of $122. This would be more than present law benefits at average earnings levels of about $420 and below, and less than present law benefits at higher levels.

A relatively small number of children and young spouses would qualify for benefits that they would not qualify for under present law because the retired person had not worked in jobs covered under social security.

Family benefits would be subject to a maximum family benefit of 250 percent of the tier I benefit--$305--plus a tier II benefit. The maximum family benefit would be lower than under present law at average earnings levels of about $530 or more; at lower levels there would be an increase.

Effects on Survivors: Surviving spouses would inherit earnings as described under earnings sharing. Benefits for the survivor of a one-earner couple with a lifelong marriage would not vary substantially from present law benefits except that benefits would be higher than under present law at very high earnings levels.

Benefits for survivors of a lifelong marriage where both spouses had worked would be higher than under present law; benefits would increase the most where each spouse had the same amount of earnings.

Benefits would be payable to surviving spouses with children in their care under the same conditions as under earnings sharing. The amount would be a tier I benefit, which would be payable regardless of whether the deceased person had ever worked in covered employment.

A one-year adjustment benefit would be provided for a surviving spouse under age 62. The amount would be 100 percent of the tier II benefit, which would be computed based on all the earnings credits of the deceased person--including earnings credits acquired from any prior marriage--plus the actual earnings of the person during a marriage that had not terminated prior to death. This benefit would be paid in addition to any benefit payable because of caring for an entitled child.

Dependent's benefits would not be paid to widows and widowers age 60 and 61; they would qualify for a one-year adjustment benefit.

The benefit for a surviving child would be a tier I benefit plus a tier II benefit, computed as described under the adjustment benefit. Where there is more than one surviving child in a family, the total benefits to the children would be a tier I benefit for each child, plus one tier II benefit for the family. Each child would get an equal share of the total.

The level of dependent's benefits payable to a surviving family compared to present law would vary substantially depending on: (1) the deceased person's average lifetime earnings level, (2) whether or not an adjustment benefit is payable, and (3) whether or not there is an entitled child under age 7, so that mother's or father's benefits would be payable.

Effects on Disabled People: Disability benefits would be payable to everyone who meets the applicable definition of disability; there would be no insured status requirement. 3/ The benefit would be a tier I benefit; if the disabled person had earnings credits as a result of his or her own earnings or due to divorce or death of a spouse, tier II benefits would be payable as well.

Benefits payable to a disabled worker would bear roughly the same relationship to present law benefits as would retirement benefits.

Benefits would be payable to disabled homemakers who had not worked in covered employment. (They would also get Medicare protection if they were entitled to disability benefits for 24 consecutive months.)

Disabled widows and widowers of any age could get tier I and tier II disability benefits, not just those age 50-60 as under present law. The benefit amount would generally be higher than present law since there would be no reduction based on age at entitlement.

3/ If the recency-of-work test under present law were not met without the inclusion of earnings credits acquired due to death or divorce of a spouse, the stricter definition of disability applicable to disabled widows and widowers under present law would apply.

Disabled divorced spouses would qualify for a tier I benefit, plus a tier II benefit based on their own earnings and on earnings credits acquired at the time of divorce. If a disabled person who was divorced was the higher earner, his or her benefits could be much lower than under present law depending on the level of earnings of the spouses and the length of the marriage. A divorced person who was the lower earner would generally get higher benefits.

The provisions for children and young spouses caring for children of disabled persons would be the same as those for dependents of retired workers.

LIMITED OPTIONS

A number of options have been suggested over the years that deal with one or more of the issues that have been raised about the treatment of women under social security. These options are narrower in scope than the two broad-scale options that have been discussed. In general, they would not make basic changes in the social security system; most of them would not eliminate the present system of dependent's benefits. One (or more) of these limited changes in the social security system could be adopted either as an alternative to the more fundamental reforms required by the earnings-sharing or double-decker options or as an interim step until a consensus is reached on what, if any, broad-scale changes should be made.

The limited options are discussed below; they are grouped according to the issues with which they would deal.

Protection for homemakers in their own right--Homemakers would receive social security earnings credits based on an imputed dollar value for their unpaid services in the home. This option, like the earnings-sharing and double-decker options, would provide protection for homemakers in their own right.

This option would not make changes in the system as comprehensive as those required by the earnings-sharing and double-decker options. It is, however, a more far-reaching change than the other limited options discussed in this section.

Table 1

Monthly Benefits for Couples and Survivors of Couples under Present Law, Earnings Sharing (Option #1) and a Double-Decker Plan (Option #2) by Proportion of Average Indexed Monthly Earnings 1/ Earned by Each Spouse 2/

AIME	Proportion of AIME Earned by Each Spouse: One Earner			2/3 - 1/3			1/2 - 1/2		
	Present Law	Option #1	Option #2	Present Law	Option #1	Option #2	Present Law	Option #1	Option #2
	Couple's Monthly Benefits								
$ 250	$288	$244	$319	$271	$244	$319	$244	$244	$319
500	408	384	394	368	384	394	384	384	394
750	528	464	469	464	464	469	464	464	469
1,000	648	544	544	544	544	544	544	544	544
1,250 3/	746	624	619	624	624	619	624	624	619
1,500 3/	802	704	694	704	704	694	704	704	694
1,750 3/	858	784	769	784	784	769	784	784	769
2,000 3/	915	864	844	835	864	844	864	864	844
	Survivor's Monthly Benefits								
$ 250	$192	$192	$197	$149	$176	$182	$122	$176	$182
500	272	272	272	218	240	242	192	240	242
750	352	352	347	272	304	302	232	304	302
1,000	432	432	422	325	368	362	272	368	362
1,250 3/	497	497	497	378	432	422	312	432	422
1,500 3/	535	535	572	432	490	482	352	490	482
1,750 3/	572	572	647	485	520	542	392	520	542
2,000 3/	610	610	722	510	550	602	432	550	602

1/ AIME is determined by (1) indexing (updating) earnings based on increases in average wage levels and (2) averaging a given number of years of highest indexed earnings. All benefits except tier I of Option #2 represent a proportion of AIME.

2/ This table shows benefits for January 1980 based on wage-indexed earnings for workers age 62 in 1980. Married couple's benefits are computed on the assumption of a lifelong marriage of two people both age 62 in 1980. The 1978 Trustees' Report alternative II economic assumptions as to wages and prices were used in computing the benefits (without regard to any transitional guarantees provided under the 1977 amendments). The amounts actually paid in 1980 will depend on changes in the economy between now and then.

3/ AIME and benefits at these levels are not possible for one worker reaching age 62 in 1980.

Table 2

75-Year Average Cost of Present Law and Additional Cost 1/ of Options by Type of Beneficiary

Type of Beneficiary	Present law 3/	Cost (As a percentage of taxable payroll 2/) Earnings Sharing	Double Decker 4/ Wage Adjustment	Price Adjustment
Aged Persons and Dependents:				
Retired Couples--	5.94	-0.27	0.03	-1.00
Men	(3.74)	(-0.48)	(0.05)	(-0.51)
Women	(2.20)	(0.21)	(-0.02)	(-0.49)
Widowed	3.42	0.00	0.01	-0.46
Divorced	0.95	0.00	0.02	-0.16
Single	0.17	0.00	0.00	-0.02
Dependent Children	0.06	0.01	-0.01	-0.03
Dependent Young Spouses	0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02
New Beneficiaries	0.00	0.03	0.10	0.07
Total for Aged Persons and Dependents	10.57	-0.25	0.11	-1.61
Young Survivors of Deceased Workers:				
Mothers/Fathers	0.11	-0.08	-0.09	-0.09
Adjustment Benefits 5/--				
Mothers/Fathers	0.00	0.04	0.03	0.03
New Beneficiaries	0.00	0.03	0.02	0.02
Children	0.47	0.09	0.05	-0.03
Total for Young Survivors of Deceased Workers	0.58	0.08	0.01	-0.07
Disabled Persons and Dependents:				
Married	1.51	-0.01	0.03	-0.23
Widowed	0.10	0.04	0.04	0.02
Divorced	0.25	-0.01	0.00	-0.05
Single	0.07	0.00	0.00	-0.01
Children	0.30	0.03	-0.02	-0.09
Dependent Spouses	0.09	-0.04	-0.06	-0.07
New Beneficiaries	0.00	0.10	0.40	0.26
Total for Disabled Persons and Dependents	2.22	0.11	0.38	-0.17
Net Cost Effect	13.36	-0.06	0.50	-1.86

1/ Estimates are based on the intermediate set of assumptions (Alternative II) in the 1978 Trustees' Report, and are the additional cost (or savings) over the cost of present law. Individual costs may not add to totals because all figures are rounded independently.

2/ Long-range costs are expressed as a percentage of taxable payroll. The cost or savings of a provision represents the average amount over a 75-year period by which the combined employee-employer social security tax rate would have to be raised or lowered to leave the social security trust funds in the same financial position.

3/ Excludes parent's benefits, special benefits to persons age 72 and over, net benefits paid through the interchange with the railroad retirement fund, lump-sum payments, and the cost of administrative expenses. The cost of present law including these items is 13.55 percent of taxable payroll.

4/ Under wage adjustment it is assumed that the tier I benefit would be adjusted by increases in wages both before and after eligibility; under price adjustment it is assumed that tier I would be adjusted by prices both before and after eligibility. In both cases, tier II would be adjusted as under present law.

5/ The cost is the total cost of adjustment benefits, the figure has not been adjusted downward to take account of the fact that some people who would receive an adjustment benefit would have received benefits under present law because of having an entitled child in their care. However, the figure for "Mothers/Fathers" has been adjusted downward to take account of persons who would be getting an adjustment benefit rather than the "Mothers/Fathers" benefit so that the total cost for young survivors represents the additional cost of the option compared to present law.

Table 3

Comparison of Major Provisions under Present Law and Comprehensive Options

Provision	Present Law	Earnings Sharing	Double Decker
Eligibility for retirement benefits	Person must have worked in covered job long enough to be insured for benefits or be a dependent of such a person.	At least one spouse must be insured as under present law.	No insured status requirement for tier I or tier II.
Earnings Credits	Person gets earnings credits based only on his or her own work in covered employment.	Total earnings of married couple divided equally between them for each year of the marriage and credited to their individual earnings records. Surviving spouse credited with 80% of earnings credits of couple (or 100% of higher earner's credits).	For Tier II, earnings credits based on person's own work in covered employment. Earnings credits of married couples (while married) divided equally at divorce. Surviving spouse credited with 30% of earnings credits of couple (or 100% of higher earner's credits).
Benefits			
A. Retired worker (married, separated, or divorced)	Gets weighted benefit based on own earnings credits.	Gets weighted benefit based on half of couple's earnings credits while married and own earnings credits while single, plus any credits acquired as a result of a prior marriage.	Gets tier I benefit of $122 plus tier II benefit equal to 30% of own average earnings and earnings credits acquired as a result of divorce or death of a spouse.
B. Aged homemaker (married, separated, or divorced)	Dependent spouse's benefit equal to 50% of retired worker's benefit.	No dependent spouse's benefits; gets benefits based on any earnings credits acquired through work or marriage.	No dependent spouse's benefits; gets tier I. Gets tier II if has any earnings credits acquired through work or as a result of a prior marriage.

Provision	Present Law	Earnings Sharing	Double Decker
C. Aged widow(er)	Dependent's benefit equal to 100% of deceased worker's benefit.	No dependent surviving spouse's benefit; gets benefit based on earnings record as described above (including credits inherited when spouse died).	No dependent surviving spouse's benefit; gets tier I. Also, tier II if has any earnings credits as described above (including credits inherited when spouse died).
D. Child	Benefit equal to 50% of worker's benefit paid to child of retired or disabled worker (75% for child of deceased worker) until child reaches age 18 (or 22, if a student). Where several children eligible family maximum applies.	Same as present law for child of retired or disabled worker. For surviving child, first child gets 100% of worker's benefit; 50% for each additional child. Total allocated equally among children and subject to family maximum.	Tier I benefit payable to child of retired, disabled, or deceased worker subject to maximum of 250% of tier I benefit. In addition, in survivor cases, one tier II benefit equal to 100% of worker's benefit payable; benefit divided equally among children.
E. Young mother's or father's benefits	50% benefit (75% in death cases) payable to young parent caring for child under age 18 (or disabled).	50% of the worker's benefit payable if there is an entitled child under age 7 in his or her care. (Not paid for any month an adjustment benefit payable.)	Tier I benefit payable if there is an entitled child under age 7 in his or her care.
F. Adjustment benefit for young widow	No comparable benefit. (Lump sum of $255 payable on death of worker.)	100% of deceased spouse's benefit payable for 1 year.	100% of deceased spouse's tier II benefit payable for 1 year.
G. Disabled person	Disabled worker who meets recency-of-work test gets benefit based on own earnings credits. Surviving spouse who meets stricter definition of disability can get a reduced dependent's benefit if age 50 or older.	Insured person gets benefits same as present law based on earnings credits as described above excluding credits acquired as a result of the present marriage.	Tier I payable. Also gets tier II if has any earnings credits acquired as described above. Where recency-of-work requirement is not met, a more strict definition of disability must be met.

This approach would eliminate the problem of duplicative protection for women who are homemakers for part of their lives and paid workers for part of their lives. It would also serve to fill any gaps in their social security protection resulting from leaving the paid labor force to perform unpaid homemaker or child-care services. In addition, protection for divorced and disabled homemakers would be increased.

This option would require setting a specific dollar value for work performed in the home. To be equitable, the value would have to be adjusted based on the time and effort each homemaker spends performing homemaking services. Such individual adjustments might not be feasible; it would seem necessary to provide a uniform credit for all homemakers (or perhaps two or three alternative amounts).

There are at least three alternatives for financing homemaker credits:

- One would be to require homemakers to pay social security taxes at the combined employer-employee rate, at the employee rate, or at the rate for the self employed (1½ times the employee rate) on the imputed value of their services. Some homemakers would object to paying the taxes since many, perhaps most, would get no greater benefits than they would get under present law as dependents with no additional cost to the family and since they have no cash income from which to pay the taxes. An alternative would be to make the protection of homemakers an optional decision for each family. It should be recognized that voluntary coverage may result in adverse selection--those who would elect coverage are likely to be those who could expect to get the highest return for their taxes. This would raise the cost of providing homemaker credits to what might be prohibitive levels.

- A second mechanism that would not disadvantage homemakers in low-income families would be to finance through general revenues the additional benefits that would be payable on account of the homemaker credits. This approach could be viewed as unfair to paid workers in covered jobs who have to pay social security taxes.

- A third alternative would be to finance the cost of the additional benefits through the social security trust funds by increases in the social security taxes of paid workers. Paid workers would doubtless object to this approach.

Greater equity between one- and two-earner couples--Three options would reduce or eliminate the difference in benefits for one- and two-earner couples with the same average earnings by modifying or eliminating dependent spouse's benefits. While these options would equalize the treatment of one- and two-earner couples and reduce the advantage married workers have over single workers, they could also adversely impact on surviving spouses and on divorced or separated spouses, or involve substantial costs. In general, these options, while resolving some of the issues, would increase concern about other issues.

Another option would provide equal treatment of one- and two-earner couples by basing benefits for a retired couple on the combined earnings of the couple. This option would be costly and would increase the advantage married workers have over single workers.

Another approach would be to pay some or all of a dependent spouse's benefit in addition to any worker's benefit to which the person is entitled. (Under the dual entitlement provision in present law, a person gets his or her own worker's benefit plus the amount, if any, by which the spouse's benefit exceeds the worker's benefit.) However, this option would be expensive and would improve the treatment of married workers compared with single workers.

Reduction in the number of years used to compute benefits--Two options would reduce the number of years of earnings used to compute benefits. These options would help women who spend part of their lives in paid employment and part in unpaid homemaker or childcare activities. They would not help lifetime homemakers.

One option would provide a shorter computation period for all workers. However, any substantial reduction in the computation period (potentially 35 years under present law) could raise a question of making specific provision for recognizing long periods of covered

employment. The inclusion of such a factor would reduce the effectiveness of such a change in helping women since many of them are not long-term workers.

The other option would provide a shorter computation period only for parents who spend time out of the paid labor force in childcare activities. This approach would primarily advantage married workers with children and thus increase the difference in benefits for married as compared with single workers. It also would raise questions as to whether similar protection should be provided for others who are out of the paid labor force for extended periods for other socially desirable purposes, e.g., care of the elderly.

Additional protection for divorced persons--Two options are directed specifically at increasing protection for divorced persons. The first option would reduce the 10-year duration-of-marriage requirement for divorced spouses. The second option would divide a couple's total annual earnings for each year of marriage 50-50 upon divorce.

Additional protection for aged surviving spouses--Four options would improve protection for surviving spouses age 60 and over. Three of the options (providing a benefit increase for very aged widows and widowers, eliminating the reduction in widow's and widower's benefits due to receipt before age 65, and basing benefits for a surviving spouse on total benefits of the married couple) would accomplish this objective by increasing benefit protection as dependents, thus increasing protection married workers have compared to single workers.

The fourth would eliminate dependent's benefits for surviving spouses and permit the surviving spouse to inherit the earnings credits of the deceased spouse. This would provide surviving spouses with protection in their own right.

Additional protection for surviving spouses under age 60--One option would reduce the age at which widow's and widower's benefits are payable below age 60, which would increase the protection married workers have over single workers. Another option would provide adjustment benefits for the surviving spouse for a period following the death of the worker. This might facili-

tate entry or reentry of surviving spouses into paid employment and would provide a short-term benefit to aid adjustment to the loss of a spouse.

Additional disability protection for women--Two options in addition to the homemaker credit approach would improve disability protection for women. One would liberalize the recent work requirement for insured status for disability benefits. This would help some women who cannot now meet the recent work test because they alternate between homemaker activities and paid employment. However, it would be costly and would not help disabled lifelong homemakers. The other option would permit employed persons to purchase disability protection for their spouses. Reaching a consensus regarding cost and level of protection under this option would be difficult.

GENDER BASED DISTINCTIONS

The issues discussed previously related primarily to the fact that most married women have social security protection as dependents; such issues do not result from different treatment of men and women under the law. There are, however, nine relatively minor provisions of the statute that treat men and women differently solely on the basis of sex. In 1977 the Carter Administration recommended proposals to make these provisions the same for men and women. The House of Representatives passed the recommended proposals as part of the bill that was to become the Social Security Amendments of 1977, but they were not included in the Senate-passed bill. The conference committee omitted the proposals and stated in its report:

> It is the understanding of the managers that the entire question of such gender-based distinctions will be included in the 6-month study of proposals to eliminate dependency and sex discrimination provided by this legislation.

Most of the gender-based distinctions are very technical and have limited applicability. All but two would have negligible program costs and would affect a very small number of people.

The two distinctions which would affect several thousand people and involve somewhat broader issues than the others are:

- Benefits are not payable to aged or disabled divorced men based on the earnings of their deceased former wives, although benefits are payable to similarly situated women; and

- Benefits are not payable to men with entitled children (under age 18 or disabled) in their care based on the earnings of their aged or disabled wives or their deceased former wives, although benefits are payable to similarly situated women.

The Administration recommended payment of benefits to men in these situations. Payment of benefits to divorced men would affect about 500 men and result in additional benefits of $1 million in each of the first 5 fiscal years (assuming a January 1980 effective date). Payment of benefits to men caring for entitled children would affect about 2,000 men and would result in additional benefits of $2 million in FY 1980, $3 million in FY 1981, and $4 million in each FY 1983 and 1984.

OFFSET PROVISION

The public pension offset provision was provided under the Social Security Amendments of 1977. In general, the provision requires the reduction of social security spouse's or surviving spouse's benefits of a person who is receiving a public pension based on his or her own work in governmental employment that is not covered under social security.

In March 1977, the Supreme Court, in Califano v. Goldfarb (and companion cases), declared unconstitutional the dependency requirements in the law for social security husband's and widower's benefits. The major effect of the Court decision was that men entitled to public pensions based on careers in governmental employment could get social security husband's and widower's benefits even though they were not economically dependent on their wives.

In May 1977, the Carter Administration recommended to Congress that both men and women be required to meet

a dependency test to qualify for spouse's or surviving spouse's benefits. However, the Congress adopted the public pension offset provision in lieu of the dependency test.

There are a number of questions with regard to the pension offset provision which can be dealt with on three levels. The broadest approach would be to eliminate dependent spouse's and surviving spouse's benefits; such an approach has already been discussed. The two other approaches discussed here are: eliminating the offset and providing an alternative, or modifying the offset. These two approaches are relatively narrow and would deal with the issues within the structure of present law.

The modifications are designed to respond to specific concerns about the provision. One concern is that the offset applies to the entire public pension from noncovered employment even though the pension may be analogous to a combination of social security plus a supplemental pension. (Present law provides no offset of pensions based on work covered under social security.) Two other concerns are that the offset does not apply to pensions based on noncovered employment for nonprofit organizations and that an exception to the effective date of the provision includes a gender-based distinction.

Also of concern are the workloads involved in administering the provision, particularly the difficulty of verifying pension amounts with the numerous public plans, especially since State and local plans are not obligated to furnish the information.

Three alternatives are also discussed: universal coverage, a dependency test, and elimination of the offset. In general, universal coverage would be the most satisfactory alternative to the offset provision; this approach is the subject of a Departmental study to be completed by December 20, 1979. However, enactment and implementation of any universal coverage proposal could not be expected to occur for several years because this is a complex and controversial issue. Eliminating the offset would have an estimated long-range cost of 0.04 percent of taxable payroll. Providing a dependency test would have a greater impact on women (particularly widows) since they are more

likely than men to be entitled to a higher benefit as a dependent than as a worker.

One modification would be to delay the application of the offset for 5 years (until December 1982). Then, if universal coverage were enacted, the offset would not have to be applied; if not, it would go into effect without further legislation. This might be preferable to repealing the offset.

CONCLUSION

Issues related to social security benefits for women have arisen primarily because of changes in American society, particularly the increased labor-force participation of women and increased divorce and remarriage rates.

This report analyzes various options to show how they would deal with the issues, how they would change the present system, what assumptions they are based on, and how much they would cost. No specific recommendations are made. The broad-scale options represent significant changes in the basic social security system and changes of this magnitude would require careful consideration and extensive public debate before they could be put forward as recommendations. This report is designed to provide a framework for future consideration and debate.

The debate needs to focus first on the future role of social security and on what issues can and should be dealt with under the program. It is only after judgments are made as to what issues should be resolved through the social security program that decisions can be made as to the appropriate ways of making the changes.